



Mercury Spills and Your Pet



Mercury is a silver liquid metal than can be harmful to your health and your pet's health too. Even a small amount of mercury, like in a mercury thermometer, can cause harm. When liquid mercury spills, it scatters in small puddles and beads. These beads give off a vapor that is heavier than air and sinks close to the floor.

When the vapor is disturbed, it moves throughout the room and into the air that we breathe. Breathing in mercury vapor can affect the nervous system causing mental and physical disorders, especially for young children and the babies carried by pregnant women. Household pets are at risk too.

By acting quickly to contain the mercury and remove it from your home, you can help to keep the people and pets in your home safe. This fact sheet gives you information on what you need to know right away when a mercury spill happens.

Where is mercury found?

Mercury can be found in older mercury fever thermometers, round wall thermostats, in some antiques and [other items](#). There is also a tiny amount of mercury in compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).

How can my pets come into contact with mercury?

There are three main ways that pets and people can be exposed to, or come into contact with, mercury and mercury vapor.

Breathing it – Breathing in mercury vapor

Touching it – Paws or claws coming into contact with mercury

Eating it – Eating or licking mercury beads



Breathing in mercury vapor does the most harm to people and to pets.

Mercury can stick to feathers, fur and hair. You and your pet could breathe in a lot of mercury vapor if they've touched the mercury. Contact with the skin does not usually cause harm since mercury does not absorb very well through unbroken skin. Watch for skin irritation if the skin was cut and came into contact with the mercury. Eating mercury is less of a concern because it does not absorb well in the stomach. It will usually pass through without making your pet sick.

What should I do if I spill mercury in my home?

The first thing that you should do is open a window so that the room can ventilate to the outside. Do not let the air from the room get into the rest of the home. You might need to shut off your furnace or air conditioner to stop the air from moving throughout the house. Then, take steps to be sure that people and pets are not walking through the area where the mercury spill happened. They could spread the mercury or cut themselves on broken glass. Move the pets to an area where there is no mercury, such as another room, the garage or the outdoors. Move pets in cages too.

What if my pet has walked through the mercury or has mercury on its fur, feathers or skin?

Place pets that have touched mercury in a crate or outdoors until they can be washed with a shampoo containing selenium sulfide like Selsun Blue®, Exsel® or Head and Shoulders Intensive Treatment Dandruff Shampoo®. Don't throw the bathwater into a storm drain or garden. Scatter it outside on the cement where the water and mercury can evaporate. Products with selenium sulfide should not be used by pregnant women. If your pet is pregnant, ask your veterinarian for advice on how to safely remove the mercury from its fur.

How should the mercury be cleaned up?

Mercury spills must be carefully cleaned up to prevent future exposure to mercury vapor. Remember, the vapor can be very harmful to humans and to pets. For complete cleanup instructions for items such as a fever thermometer, read the [Indoor Mercury Spills](#) fact sheet. To find cleanup instructions for a CFL bulb, read the [Compact Fluorescent Light Bulb](#) fact sheet. You can find both fact sheets and more information about mercury at www.michigan.gov/mercury. You can also contact your local health department to get instructions on mercury cleanup. The health department can help you decide if your home should be tested to see if mercury vapor is present.

Should I contact my veterinarian?



After following the steps to properly clean the mercury spill, your pet should be examined by your veterinarian. Medical testing may be necessary. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your pet is showing any of the following signs: weakness, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, difficulty breathing, lack of appetite, tremors, seizures, difficulty walking, sitting, standing or rising, increased urination or salivation.

Questions about your pet's exposure to mercury or mercury vapor can be addressed by calling your veterinarian or the ASPCA's (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals) Poison Control Center for more information at (888) 426-4435.

How else can my pet be exposed to mercury?

A different type of mercury, methylmercury, is found in fish. If you feed your pet tuna, you should limit the tuna to 10% or less of your pet's daily calories. For information about mercury in fish, read the [Avoid Mercury in Fish and Seafood](#) brochure, available at www.michigan.gov/mdch-toxic.

Where can I get more information?

For more information about mercury, call the Michigan Department of Community Health, 1-800-MI-TOXIC (648-6942), go to www.michigan.gov/mercury, or contact your local veterinarian.



**Stop mercury
spills before
they happen!**

The best way to protect your pet is to get rid of mercury before a spill happens. Many Clean Sweep Sites and community Household Hazard Waste (HHW) collection centers accept mercury-containing items and spill waste from the public at no charge. To find centers in your area, call your [local health department](#) or go to [Clean Sweep](#) map. Call first to get information on how to wrap and transport the item. and for drop-off times.